

A Shot in the Dark

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Category: Avatar: Last Airbender

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Tragedy

Language: English

Characters: Longshot

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-09 05:08:06

Updated: 2016-04-09 05:08:06

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:24:38

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,907

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: A young boy takes pride in his archery. Then, the Fire Nation attacks and everything changes.

A Shot in the Dark

The village was a small one. It was located on the Jedong Peninsula, a long, talon-like stretch of grasslands and forest to north of Chameleon Bay. It had a name, of course, but hardly anyone used it. It wasn't quite necessary. Everyone in the village knew each other, and the strangest person to arrive would be a trader from Ba Sing Se or, in the olden days, an Air Nomad.

His parents had been simple people. His father was, quite simply, a hunter. He plied his trade in the nearby woods, trapping and hunting a variety of animals to provide for himself and his wife.

And then, one day, they had borne a child. A young baby boy with pointed, almost hawkish features. They had given him a name, and they had given him a home, though they themselves struggled to live in an increasingly impassioned world.

His parents had grown up in a world at war. The Fire Nation's war had been news everywhere, and their unstoppable advance, even after their first defeat at Ba Sing Se, was whispered of in fear. Yet in the village, life continued on, unconcerned with any politics or war.

Whilst others fought, bled, and died on the battlefields of the Earth Kingdom, the people of the village had simply survived. The village was life, and life was only in the village.

The boy grew quickly. His father took him from a young age into the forests, teaching him how to hunt. He taught his young son how to tell what direction a fox-antelope was running, or how many Jackalopes were in a warren. He taught him how to climb a tree, how

to shoot straight, and how to perceive things that others would blunder by.

The boy was happy. This was something he was good at. He may not have gotten along with the other children, but he enjoyed his time with his father and spent every waking moment honing his skills. His skill with a bow quickly became unparalleled, and many whispered that the young boy's skills even rivaled those of the infamous Yuyan Archers.

Yet he did not for the killing, but for the serenity. The anticipation of drawing the bow, knocking the arrow, and regarding the prey as the bow's deadly payload quivered in the morning dew. The few instants where nothing in the world mattered but him and his prey.

* * *

><p>They had come in the middle of the day. The stories the other children had told made it seem as if the skull-faced demons emerged from the woods at night, throwing flames and destruction without mercy.

It was somehow more terrifying that they came in the day, unperturbed by the sun and proving themselves to be man; not beast.

He had woken to screams. His mother had rushed into his room, clutching him to her breast as she looked around in fear. The boy's father had stormed in, his bow in one hand, and his arrows in the other. He thrust the bow into his son's hand, drawn his sword, and run to join the other men.

Hours passed. Screams, and flames engulfed the village. Someone entered the house, and the mother and son stirred, hopeful that it was the father, returning from battle. The heavy footfalls of leather boots said otherwise.

He was tall, with darker skin and a cruel, jagged scar that ran down the left side of his face, crossing over a milky, unseeing eye and lending him a threatening visage. He smiled, cruelly, and had drawn his sword, a flame blinking into existence in his other hand, flaring and spitting with rage.

* * *

><p>He had run into Jet by accident.</p>

His years of living in the forests, living off the land, and avoiding both civilization and the Fire Nation had changed the once-optimistic boy into something else entirely. He had starved, survived, and scraped an existence as best he could from the muck of human cruelty and conquest.

He had killed predators, struggled against beasts, and hunted his prey, becoming a predator himself. Life in the wilds was unforgiving, and it had turned the boy into a man.

He had just finished killing his dinner that evening when he had heard the clashing of steel against steel. The boy had heard this sound many times, sitting in the highest trees and watching the

battles like a sport, watching the shifting tides of red and green as rock and fire killed men as much as sword and bow.

For some reason, however, he felt compelled to investigate these sounds, more than before. In the years following, he could never quite put his finger on why.

A cluster of boys, led by a taller teenager with two hook-swords, had been completely surrounded by Fire Nation soldiers, who charged again and again at the children with spears ready and swords drawn. A burly, large child picked up several soldiers, tossing them aside like firewood as the others fought for their lives.

By all rights, he should have left them to their fate. The rules of nature, the rules of the wild meant that fighting a hopeless battle yielded no results.

Almost instinctively, he sighted his bow, and fired, felling a soldier and drawing the attention of all of them. Cowed by the appearance of a hidden archer, the soldiers retreated, running from young boys as if they were the plague.

They had greeted him afterwards, congratulating him on his kill and asking him his name.

He didn't answer. It wasn't that he didn't know how to speakâ€| it just wasn't necessary.

Cowed by his silence the others had gone into their own groups, leaving the taller boy with the hook-swords and the boy from the long-gone village. The taller boy said little, only complimenting the boy's archery and offering him a place in their band.

A chance to strike back at those that had taken everything and do what was right.

Despite every instinct telling him otherwise, the boy had nodded. The other children had cheered, and offered him a nickname that became the only name that he ever cared for:

Longshot.

* * *

><p>When the fighting had finished and the world had moved on, Longshot was suddenlyâ€| lost. Homes were offered, apprenticeships, even jobs. Yet a life without war- without the companionship of the other freedom fighters, without Jetâ€|

He found himself lost in a miasma of uncertainty.

So he ran. Again. He ran from the only family he remembered and returned to the woods where he had been forged, and life resumed as if it had never stopped. Lone travelers were something to be avoided, and Longshot's place in the hierarchy of nature was reestablished. He was sorry to see the days of gallivanting across the Earth Kingdom go, but he knew that this was his true place in the world, and he regretted nothing.

The others had come looking for him several times. Smellerbee, of

course, had come the closest. She knew him too well, and it had taken everything he had to stay hidden, perched in the trees above. One time, near Kyoshi Island, she had caught a glimpse of him, calling out, but he had moved on reluctantly, doubt permeating every inch of his body.

* * *

><p>He realized his mistake almost immediately. The trampled grass and the small cluster of eggs told him all that he needed to know, even before the enraged roar and the simple swipe of a paw that had sent him flying.</p>

His bones broke like twigs, and his body screamed in pain as he lay there. The platypus-bear lumbered closer, growling at him, seeing him as prey. With a tremendous effort, he drew an arrow swiftly, precisely landing it in front of the bear, scaring him away.

Longshot dragged himself away, cursing himself for his clumsiness and knowing that he wouldn't return from this one easily.

* * *

><p>He returned to his camp after hours of excruciating pain, blood loss, and fear. The fire was long-gone, washed away by the rain, but he propped himself against a nearby tree nonetheless.</p>

This was his camp after all. Temporary it may be, it was home.

His vision blurred, and he shook his head violently, sending shockwaves of pain down his spine and clarifying his vision. The foreign taste of chocolate strangely filled his mouth, and he almost choked on it, spitting out a wad of bloody saliva and grimacing as the sweet taste of chocolate was replaced by the copper of his own blood.

That he had tasted chocolate, of all things, meant that his head had been injured in some way. Perhaps he could no longer trust his senses.

His chest was a mess of blood, ruptured skin, and gore, and he knew that no self-administered aid would do him any good.

He also suspected that his legs were broken, along with a great many other bones, but he supposed that at this point, it didn't really make all that much of a difference.

Longshot gasped in pain, wincing as he propped himself further upwards, sitting down as if in a chair, staring at the ruined mess of his body in content.

He was fine with this.

He stared up at the green canopy, listening to the chirps of birds and yelps of animals, and the pain dulled somewhat, no doubt his body doing its best to minimize the pain.

For a moment, Longshot wondered how old he was. By his best estimates, he was probably around twenty-three, but he wasn't

entirely sure. It seemed like an eternity since he had been with the others at Yu Dao, and even longer still since he had first met Avatar Aang, Katara, and Sokka on that fateful day that changed everything.

It seemed even longer since he had seen his mentor and friend die in the bowels of Lake Laogai, the Avatar himself unable to help.

He hissed in pain again as he manipulated his leg, tucking it closer to his body and feeling jagged edges where they should not have been.

Longshot let go again, and the pain retreated, giving him a moment of peace.

As he felt his vision dimming and his body going numb, he sighed in relief, glad that the pain was over. The memories of his mother's death, the burning of his village, and the death of his father seemed to dissolve as darkness overtook him.

For a moment, a sense of serenity and acceptance came over him. No matter what his choices had been, this was how it ended, and he was fine with that. He was proud of what he had accomplished in his life, and he was confident that he would be remembered.

Not that that was important. Longshot knew very well that his body would serve as food for the denizens of the forest. Those that he had once hunted would fittingly consume his body, returning his very essence to the forests he had called home for so very long.

He leaned his head back almost lazily, muttering a string of words from a childhood poem his mother had told him, and welcomed the embrace of nothingness.

* * *

><p>(1787 Words)

Character: Longshot

Prompts:

Medium- (taste) chocolate

Hard- (restriction) no dialogue

**Bonus- main character is a minor character **

** element included**

End
file.